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ABSTRACT

The transfer of schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to public school systems has been occurring for more than 100 years. When these schools are transferred to the public school systems, a financial impact on school operations, school construction, and the instructional program is felt by the public schools. Because of the financial impact and the special needs of schools educating Indian children, problems arise from transferring BIA schools to public schools. In the past, transfers have been accomplished through political pressure and arbitrary decisions. Today, most educators in the BIA and public schools, along with many tribal leaders, agree that what is needed is a planned program for transfer that involves the mutual readiness of Indian people and non-Indian people; financial support from the local school district, state, and Federal Sources; and training of Indians and non-Indians in school affairs. A process consisting of 6 phases--compilation of basic data, school evaluation, determination of present status of transition or transfer, development of community readiness, preparation of a time-table, and follow-up--is presented in this paper. (LS)

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IMPACT OF TRANSFER OF SCHOOLS AND PUPILS

FROM BIA TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
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IMPACT OF TRANSFER OF SCHOOLS AND PUPILS

FROM BIA TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A. The Problem - Its nature and scope

The transfer of schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to public school systems has been happening for more than one hundred years. When these schools are transferred to the public school systems a financial impact on school operations, school construction, and the instructional program is felt by the public schools. Nevertheless, these transfers have been made extensively in every "Indian" state for many years. In F. Y. 1969, there were 178,476 Indian students (ages 5-18 years) enrolled in public, Federal, private, and mission schools.[1] Of these students, 66.7% attended public schools, 27.3% attended Federal schools, and 6.0% attended mission and other schools.

Today, the Bureau of Indian Affairs operates 223 schools and 18 dormitories with a total enrollment of 56,560 Indian students. Public schools enrolled in F. Y. 1969, 119,123 Indian children. Because of the financial impact and the special needs of schools educating Indian children, only one-third of the Indian children in public schools receive their education without

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[1]Statistics Concerning Indian Education, F. Y. 1969, USDI-BIA

supplementary help from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This points up the problems arising from transfers and proposals to transfer BIA schools to public schools.

The problems, although they appear to stem from purely financial considerations, involve several other related factors. Public schools receiving the new Indian children may not be geared to meet the immediate learning needs of Indian students. Non-Indian students and parents and community are often ill-informed and prejudiced and as a result, Indian students often fall behind in their studies, do not mix with their non-Indian peers, and become discouraged. Indian parents have seen this happen too often, and have in recent years voiced their opinions regarding the transfer of BIA schools to public schools. In fact, the transfers have in recent years slowed down considerably because of the Indian tribal leaders' fears that this is another step toward "termination" (meaning termination of BIA services for Indian people). This is evidenced by the fact that in F. Y. 1969 only two small BIA day schools were transferred to the public schools.

Thus, the impact of transfer of BIA schools and students into the public schools may be grouped into three main classes: financial, school curriculum, and community attitude.

B. Current Status of Problem

Historically, transfers have been accomplished through political pressures and arbitrary decisions. For many decades the policy of the Federal Government has been to provide the same opportunities for public school education for Indians as are provided

for other citizens living within a state. As early as 1912 approximately 25% of the Indian students attending school were in the public schools. By 1926, more than 50% attended public schools.[2] Most states have agreed with this policy, and their state constitutions recognize the state responsibility for the education of all Indian children on the same basis as other children within the state. In some states, however, tax-exempt Indian-owned lands and large numbers of Indian children within a school district create financial burdens which cannot be met fully from school district revenues. This accounts for the BIA supplemental financial support for 596 districts* in twenty-one states enrolling approximately 60, 106 Indian children.[3]

With these facts in mind, the impact is great because approximately two of every three Indian students already attend public schools and two-thirds of these public schools claim and participate in the supplemental aid program through the Johnson O'Malley Act of 1934. The transfer of the remaining 223 BIA schools and 18 dormitories operated by BIA provides a different kind of impact and in recent years the possibility of transfer has aroused concern among Indian

*Many of the districts listed contain several schools enrolling Indian children receiving benefit from BIA Johnson O'Malley Act funds.

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[2]Institute for Government Research-The Problem of Indian Administration-Johns Hopkins Press 1928, pp. 415-416

[3]Directory of Public Schools served by Johnson O'Malley Act funds, BIA Division of Public School Relations, 6/17/69-unpublished document.

leaders faced with this possibility.

C. A planned program of transfer and follow-up support is needed.

This approach has been tried and talked about and proposed in years past, but never with enough planning, with enough financial backing, and never with enough community (Indian and non-Indian) involvement. As a result, the transfers, when they came, seemed to be arbitrary, even if legal.

On August 2, 1967, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs set forth a policy and program entitled: "A Planned Program of Transition from Bureau to Public School Operation." This was in the form of a memorandum to all Area Directors and, in part, states:

> The success of the transfers from Bureau of Indian Affairs to public school operation which have taken place to date is due directly to the work of Area and Agency staffs in bringing about harmonious relationships and understandings between the people the schools serve and the public school systems. It is with this in mind and with the conviction that the Bureau must provide the local programs with greater support than it has hitherto been able to establish, that this proposal is made.
>
> The Branch of Public School Relations of the Division of Education has, as one of its functions, responsibility for assisting field offices with step-by-step planning in all aspects of transition or transfer of Bureau operated schools to the public school system. As you know, this involves many educational activities directly and has indirect relationships to other Bureau programs. As a Bureau we are committed to the policy of transfer of educational responsibility to the public school system when there is mutual readiness on the part of the Indian community and public school officials, and ability on the part of the public schools to provide a quality educational program.
>
> Although the process of transition or transfer to public school operation presents many problems, it can be analyzed and planned on a continuing basis at each location. Two of the most significant aspects of such a program may

be the further development of community attitudes or readiness and the provision for adequate funding of the public school operation after the transfer is effected. The Branch of Public School Relations has developed some comprehensive plans for facilitating transfer and was able to present these to some Area Directors at the Santa Fe education conference during the first week of June. Most Assistant Area Directors (Education) have seen the plans and materials.

As a next step we propose that meetings involving Washington office, Area office, and Agency officials be held and that Indian representatives be invited as full participants. The purpose of the meetings may be outlined as follows:

1. To develop a further understanding of the implications of transfer to public school systems, including the relative advantages and disadvantages of such transfer and the responsibilities of Bureau, public school, and tribal officials and rank and file members of the Indian and non-Indian communities.

2. To develop grass-roots systematic approaches to the school transition program as a guide for each community.

3. To help Indian people become even more knowledgeable about and trained in the conduct of public school affairs.

4. To present briefly the history of the movement from Bureau to public school operations.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs gave further support of this concept in his policy statement issued in April, 1969, which states:

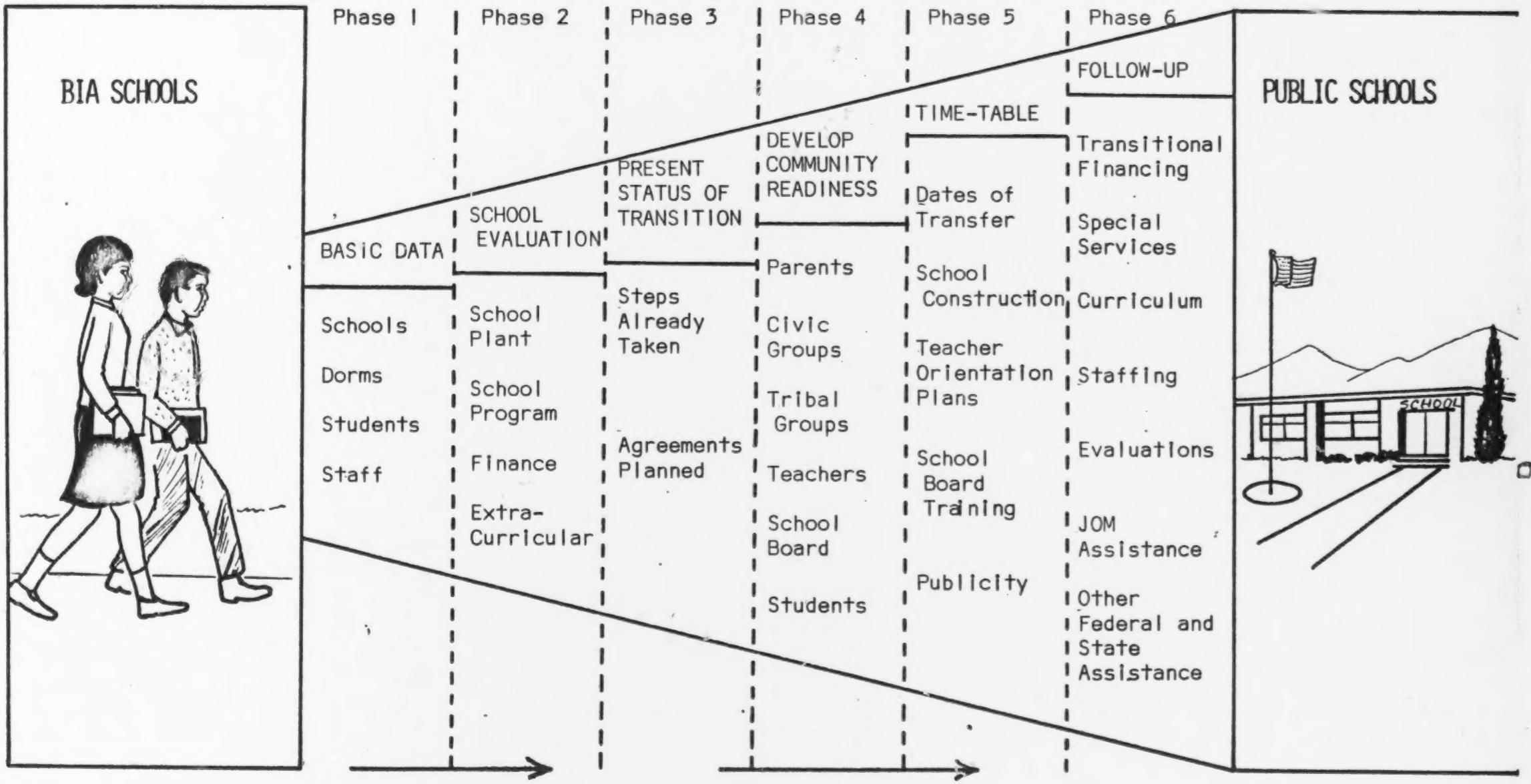
> The mobility of the Indian people has made it unrealistic for the States to limit their concern to restricted areas such as reservations, districts, or other political subdivisions in dealing with the education of Indian children. The Bureau of Indian Affairs will continue to recognize that the education of Indian children living on or near reservations will be its first responsibility.
>
> It shall also recognize the need of States for assistance in dealing with Indian education on a statewide basis. In order for them to

> qualify for this assistance they must (1) have accepted responsibility for financing basic education for Indians living on or near reservations and are providing resources for this purpose; (2) show need to develop programs that benefit Indian children regardless of location; (3) be in need of funds for special projects that they have been unable to secure from other sources.

There has been little argument against the soundness of this policy. Most educators in BIA and public schools along with many tribal leaders agree that what is needed is a planned program which involves (1) mutual readiness of Indian people and non-Indian people, (2) financial support from the local school, district, state, and Federal sources, and (3) training of Indians and non-Indians in schcol affairs.

The process is complex but can be analyzed and accomplished in logical steps. There are at least six phases in the "transition" to public schools. The following chart outlines these phases.

TRANSITION TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS



If each step is taken with thoughtful grass-roots planning and involvement of Indian and non-Indian people of the community, the transfer can be made smoothly and result in better school programs for each student. A brief outline of some of the facts to be assembled and processes to be completed in each phase is provided for illustrative purposes:

Phase I - Basic Data

1. Basic facts concerning BIA operated schools
2. Public schools, e.g., type of school, name of school
3. Superintendent or Principal Location State County
4. Nearest town or other school
5. Date of school construction
6. Number of classrooms, number of teachers
7. Enrollment capacity
8. Enrollment by grade and ethnic group
9. Extent of subject offerings by grade and time allocations per week
10. Number of administrative employees
11. Pupil-teacher ratio
12. Number of kitchen and dining employees
13. Number of custodial employees
14. Number of special teachers or counselors, e.g., attendance officers, teachers of handicapped, arts and crafts instructors, remedial teachers
15. Major school recreation and extra curricular activities

16. Extent of public school operations in the school program, e.g., one or more public school teachers, one or more public school and other employees, finances contributed by public schools

Phase I Additional Facts (for public schools already receiving funds from Johnson O'Malley Act)

1. Chairman of School Board

2. Names of Indian education leaders or Indian school board members

3. Name of school superintendent county superintendent

4. Ownership of School Facilities and land

5. Date of last State or District Johnson O'Malley Plan

6. Annual per capita cost of education (broken into categories)

7. Assessed valuation per student enrolled

8. Local tax effort per capita

9. Present status of school district bonding capacity

10. Annual receipts from P. L. 874 _____

11. Amount of P. L. 874 for Indians _____

12. Receipts for school construction from P. L. 815 - date

13. Amount of State aid per capita

14. Amount per capita received from special tax revenue _____

15. Amount of funds from Johnson O'Malley program

16. Principal uses of Johnson O'Malley funds

17. Number of Indian students transported
(Percent Indian of total students transported)

Phase II - School Evaluation

1. Adequacy of school buildings for all students

2. Safety of school buildings

3. Adequacy of school transportation

4. Number of teachers with special qualifications in teaching Indian children

5. Number of teachers with advanced training above minimum required

6. Number of teachers with less than minimum standards of qualification

7. Basic entrance salary rate

8. Housing facilities for school staff and rental rates

9. Number of student counselors

10. Percentage of teacher turn-over per year

11. Number of school staff who have taken extra courses or in-service training courses related to Indian education in past five years

12. Program of studies questionnaire

13. Budget and financial arrangements, including finance plans from present to transfer year plus five years following

Phase III - Present Status of Transition or Transfer

1. Steps taken to date

2. Informal or formal agreements reached

3. Financial arrangements and plans for transfer

4. School construction plans

5. Plans for employment of BIA staff

6. Plans for staff and student orientation

7. Community and tribal leaders involvement

8. Plans for public school enrichment and curriculum change

Phases IV, V, and VI

These phases are continuing steps in the process of transition and are closely related. Therefore, they are grouped together in this paper.

1. Description of the local community

2. Population within school district, including Indian students

3. Educational levels of adults (Indian and non-Indian)

4. Average family incomes

5. Number and percent of parents who pay for children's school lunches

6. Community activities and organizations in district which affect youth

7. Community attitude survey regarding transfer (chart)

8. Development of timetable for transfer

   a. Involvement of Indians, non-Indians, School Boards

   b. Finance plans for five years developed and approved

   c. School construction plans completed

   d. Applications for and approval of federal education aid

   e. Other

9. Follow-up

   a. Financing for transitional year

b. Support for special services

c. New curriculum and staffing

d. Continuous evaluations

e. Johnson O'Malley support

A number of outgrowths of the Commissioner's policy has taken place since 1967. Some of these are:

1. Series of school district seminars with Indian leaders, school board members and Bureau and public school officials have been held. These have resulted in clarification and understandings regarding school programs, financial support and mutual cooperation.

2. At least two Bureau schools have been contracted to tribal groups or corporations for operational purposes.

3. Two national Indian workshops on school affairs sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs were planned and conducted by Indian leaders for over 500 Indians from nearly every tribal group. *

4. School Board Training programs have been conducted by the United Pueblos at Albuquerque, the Navajo Tribal Council, the Advisory School Boards of West Oklahoma, the Cherokee Advisory boards, and others.

5. A great number of meetings have been attended and reports

*See First National Indian Workshop Report-Published by BIA, Instructional Service Center, Brigham City, Utah, and Second National Indian Workshop Report - Published by SWCEL, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

have been made by delegates to these meetings and training seminars.

6. There are 527 Indians serving as elected members of school boards.

7. A packet of school board training materials has been developed by the Bureau's Instructional Service Center at Brigham City, Utah, and is being distributed and used at School Board Training meetings.

8. A general "awakening" has taken place and Indian parents are showing much interest in school affairs. The impact on public schools is great and rapid changes are taking place in Bureau schools.

9. Nearly every Bureau operated school now has an advisory school board. These boards are becoming active.

10. New curriculum materials, new school design and construction, and new educational approaches including individualized instruction are being developed in many Bureau and public schools.

Thus, a beginning has been made and the development of "Mutual Readiness" is underway.

The steps remaining vary with each District and State and with each reservation. Some are at Phase VI and require careful financial planning and continued support while other BIA schools have not reached Phase I (See Chart, Page 8).

D. Recommendations

There can be little doubt that the systematic approach outlined in Section C for developing mutual readiness is sound. However, it does require manpower and financial support at the reservation (school-community) level. Based on field observations and recommendations of National Indian Leaders[4] the following recommendations, if carried out, should aid the processes of transition to public schools and enhance the quality of education for Indian students:

1. Local financial aid should be obtained to utilize Indian resources in developing mutual readiness, Phases I through VI.
2. Intensify and support training of Indian Advisory School Board members, elected school board members and potential school board members at the reservation level, state level, and national level.
3. Actively support and encourage parental involvement of Indian and non-Indians in school affairs.
4. Support and encourage Indian students and young people to obtain educational and professional development.
5. Utilize local Indian leaders, students, parents in actively developing realistic curriculum content and course offerings in the public schools.

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[4]Recommendations adapted from Report of 1st National Indian Workshop on School Affairs and other letters and reports resulting from this Workshop and Regional, Area and local school affairs reports.

E. Methodological Considerations

To successfully accomplish the five recommendations requires a team effort of local, state, Federal, and Indian leadership. There have been, as indicated earlier in this paper, successful programs in a few local districts. In each successful program some or all of the phases outlined in this paper were accomplished and the five recommendations were achieved. However, the major task lies ahead because the educational needs of Indian children are not being met by the majority of schools enrolling Indian children; Indian and non-Indian people are too often not working together to improve education programs in the local community; and a further pooling of financial resources needs to be made to support the education and training programs recommended.

The financial backing, the training of Indian and community leadership, and the involvement of parents of children must be done at local community (Reservation) levels. The organizational capabilities already exist at these levels with BIA offices, O. E. O. programs, school districts, schools, and other community and Federal and State organizations. It would seem, therefore, that a strong community council chairmanshipped and staffed with trained Indian and non-Indian leaders should be established and supported by every existing Federal, State, county, reservation, and community organization. This council could then initiate and develop the mutual

readiness" and the continued support of each phase of the recommended transition program. Each existing agency should feed in to the council its strengths of professional and financial support. This should be a continuing program, whether transfers of schools and children have been accomplished or not. For example, BIA schools which were transferred in the 1920's and 1930's are in great need of follow-up support as outlined in Phase 6 of the transition chart.

Because each school and each community is different from other schools and communities throughout the country, the people living there need to develop their own solutions. What has been tried in the past from the "top down" (from Federal and State devised programs imposed on local communities) must be reversed so that the local people can work the solutions out in their own way without the traditional control of "higher" echelons of State and Federal Government. This may require additional State and Federal legislation. However, the recent awareness of Indian education problems in the public and Bureau schools has set the stage for this kind of support from existing State and Federal agencies. The "grass roots" need to be fed and nurtured and allowed to grow in and around each reservation and each Indian community.

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